

**CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)**  
**OPENING STATEMENT FOR GOES-R HEARING**  
**September 28, 2006**

I want to welcome everyone here for what may very well be the final hearing of my tenure. And we picked a vital and future-looking subject for this hearing – the procurement of the next generation of weather satellites, known as GOES-R.

As I think everyone knows, our past hearings on weather satellites have not been very happy occasions for anybody. The polar satellite program, NPOESS, was entirely out of whack – over budget, behind schedule, losing capability and grossly mismanaged.

One reason the NPOESS program got that way was inadequate oversight – and that includes inadequate oversight by the leadership at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and inadequate oversight by us. We are asking NOAA to learn from its mistakes, and we're going to try to do the same.

In the case of NPOESS, we are now getting monthly updates from NOAA, and I hope the Committee will have periodic hearings to keep the NPOESS procurement process transparent, the public informed and the agency and its contractors on their toes. And now, early on in the procurement process, we are going to inaugurate that same open, continual oversight approach for GOES-R. This should be the first of many hearings on this critical weather satellite program.

The GOES-R hearings ought to go better than NPOESS hearings have so far. I am happy to say that it appears that NOAA has indeed been learning from its mistakes, and I want to compliment Admiral Lautenbacher for that.

With GOES-R, NOAA is trying to evaluate its technology assumptions early and not overreach. NOAA has put together stellar independent cost review teams and what looks like an appropriate senior management team. Neither of these steps was taken in the case of NPOESS, and NOAA is taking action now for GOES-R precisely to avoid repeating past mistakes. That's reassuring.

At the same time, there are some red flags already for us. The budget estimates for GOES-R are already close to doubling. Now, this is very early in the process – exactly when NOAA can make design changes to control costs in the end. But still, it's not comforting that the estimates were so far off so early. Also, NOAA is already dropping an advanced sensor. Again, this is in many ways a good thing – untried, problematic technology shouldn't be used on operational satellites. But it means that GOES-R may represent much less of a technological advance than had been hoped.

So one of our tasks today is to get a clear fix on the current status of GOES-R – its costs and capabilities – with the understanding that that information will continue to change. But our more important task is to set up a system of Congressional oversight and to make sure that NOAA has set up a system of internal oversight to prevent future problems.

The very helpful Government Accountability Office (GAO) study that is being released at today's hearing should guide NOAA and this Committee as we ensure that NOAA has taken all the steps necessary to increase the chances of success, and as we determine what information Congress and the public need as the project moves ahead.

The data from weather satellites have become features of our everyday lives, and they help protect life and property. But we need to be sure that we are getting the best satellites feasible for the lowest cost possible. That requires constant vigilance, and today we start that oversight.

Mr. Gordon.